

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 LONDON 07328

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, UK, GW, IT, NATO

SUBJECT: EUROPEAN MULTI ROLE COMBAT AIRCRAFT (MRCA)

SUMMARY: SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1968, USG HAS TAKEN A "HANDS OFF" ATTITUDE TOWARD THE MULTI ROLE COMBAT AIRCRAFT (MRCA) UNDER DEVELOPMENT BY UK, FRG AND ITALY, IN PART BECAUSE OF DOUBTS WHETHER THIS IS BEST USE OF EUROPEAN RESOURCES AND IN PART FOR ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR US AEROSPACE SALES. IN CONSEQUENCE WE HAVE OFFICIALLY NEITHER TRIED TO HELP NOR HINDER PROGRAM. HOWEVER, MRCA HAS PROCEEDED AND NOW REPRESENTS REAL TEST OF ABILITY OF A GROUP OF OUR NATO ALLIES TO DEVELOP AND PRODUCE AN AD-

VANCED AIRCRAFT SYSTEM WHICH WILL BE DEDICATED TO NATO SERVICE. ALTHOUGH PROGRAM IS STILL VULNERABLE TO POLITICAL PRESSURES IN THE THREE COUNTRIES, IT NOW APPEARS MORE LIKELY TO SUCCEED THAN TO FAIL. IF IT SUCCEEDS IT WILL BE SEEN AS VICTORY FOR PRINCIPLE OF EUROPEAN DEFENSE COOPERATION AND, BY EXTENSION, PRINCIPLE OF COMMON PROCUREMENT AND STANDARDIZATION. IF IT FAILS IT COULD HAVE DEMORALIZING
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ZING IMPACT ON WILLINGNESS OF KEY ALLIES TO EXPEND RE-

SOURCES AND SKILLS FOR EUROPEAN DEFENSE. THIS EMBASSY BELIEVES IT IS NOW APPROPRIATE AND DESIRABLE FOR US TO ADOPT A POSTURE OF ACTIVE SUPPORT FOR THIS TRIPARTITE EFFORT AND TO EXTEND WHATEVER FACILITATIVE ASSISTANCE WE CAN TO ENHANCE PROSPECTS FOR ITS SUCCESS. THIS MESSAGE SUMMARIZES BACKGROUND AND PRESENT STATUS OF PROGRAM, OUTLINES SEVERAL ACTIONS US COULD REASONABLY TAKE TO GIVE IT A "FAIR WIND" AND RELATES SUCH A POSTURE TO OUR ONGOING INTERESTS IN MILITARY SALES IN EUROPE. ACTION REQUESTED: COMMENTS FROM EMBASSIES BONN, ROME AND US MISSION NATO, AND STATE/DOD REACTIONS TO RECOMMENDATIONS MADE. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND. AFTER SERIES OF MIS-STARTS BEGINNING WITH CANCELLATION OF TSR-2 IN 1965, CONTINUING THROUGH THE 1967 REVERSAL OF DECISION TO BUY F-111-K, AND ENDING WITH ABORTIVE UK/FRENCH VARIABLE GEOMETRY AIRCRAFT PROGRAM, UK AGREED IN 1968 TO JOIN FIVE OTHER NATO COUNTRIES WHO WERE FACED WITH PROBLEM OF F-104 REPLACEMENT.

2. ON JULY 25, 1968, THE UK SIGNED A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH BELGIUM, CANADA, GERMANY, ITALY AND THE NETHERLANDS WHICH EXPRESSED THEIR MUTUAL INTEREST IN A MULTI ROLE COMBAT AIRCRAFT (MRCA). THE GOVERNMENTS WERE SEEKING SOME WAY OF MEETING THE REQUIREMENT FOR A HIGH PERFORMANCE MEDIUM RANGE STRIKE/ATTACK AIRCRAFT, ABLE TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY IN ALL WEATHER, DAY AND NIGHT, FOR SERVICE BY THE END OF THE 1970'S. FOR ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL REASONS, THE NUMBER OF COUNTRIES IN THE PROGRAM DROPPED FROM SIX TO THREE: THE UNITED KINGDOM, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY AND ITALY. ON MARCH 26, 1968 AFTER INTENSIVE STUDIES, DISCUSSIONS AND TRADEOFF ANALYSES, THE THREE COUNTRIES FORMED THE NATO MRCA MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION (NAMMO) TO DIRECT AND MANAGE THE PROGRAM. TWO INTER-

NATIONAL AEROSPACE MANAGEMENT COMPANIES WERE ORGANIZED FOR DEVELOPING AND MANUFACTURING THE MRCA: PANAVIA AIRCRAFT LTD., COMPOSED OF BRITISH AIRCRAFT CORP., MBB AND AERITALIA, WAS FOR THE AIRFRAME AND AVIONICS; TURBO UNION LTD., CONSISTING OF ROLLS ROYCE, MTU AND FIAT, FOR THE RB-199 ENGINE.

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3. DEFINITION PHASE BEGAN IN APRIL 1969 AND MRCA MISSIONS WERE DEFINED AS BATTLEFIELD INTERDICTION, STRIKE, AIR SUPDRIORITY AND TACTICAL RECONNAISSANCE. STUDIES RESULTED IN TWO SEAT, TWO ENGINE, SUPERSONIC SWING WING MACH 2 AIRCRAFT WEIGHING 42,000 POUNDS WITH LOW LEVEL COMBAT RADIUS OF UP TO 400 NM AND FERRY RANGE OF 2,300 NM. THROUGH INITIAL STUDIES AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, THREE PARTNERS WORKED TO MAXIMIZE EFFORTS TOWARD

STANDARDIZATION. WORKING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG GOVERNMENTS AT POLITICAL, MILITARY AND INDUSTRIAL LEVELS HAVE DISPLAYED UNITY OF EFFORT NOT SEEN BEFORE IN EUROPEAN PROGRAMS.

4. PROGRAM STATUS. THE MRCA PROGRAM CALLS FOR NINE PROTOTYPE AIRCRAFT. OF THESE, THE UK WILL BUILD 4, THE FRG

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3 AND ITALY 2. ALL AIRCRAFT ARE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN FLYING BY MIDDLE OF 1976 WITH MAJORITY ACHIEVING THEIR FIRST FLIGHT BY END OF 1975. IN EARLY 1976 THE GOVERNMENTS MUST MAKE THEIR COMMITMENT FOR A PRODUCTION BUY ALTHOUGH LONG LEAD PRODUCTION ORDERS HAVE ALREADY BEEN STARTED.

CURRENT PLANNED BUY IS FOR 807 AIRCRAFT: 385

UK, 322 FRG AND 100 ITALY.

5. TECHNICAL STATUS: THE FIRST TWO PROTOTYPES ARE NOW FLYING: ONE AT MBB IN MANCHING, GERMANY, AND THE OTHER AT BAC IN WARTON, ENGLAND. FIFTY-THREE HOURS HAVE BEEN

FLOWN AS OF MAY 1, 1975, 33 HOURS BY NUMBER ONE AT MAN-
CHING AND 20 HOURS BY NUMBER TWO AT WARTON. PROGRAM IS
BEHIND SCHEDULE, PRIMARILY DUE TO ENGINE AND WEATHER
PROBLEMS. HOWEVER, DUE TO THE ON-BOARD AIR-TO-GROUND
REAL TIME DATA SYSTEM EMPLOYED DURING FLIGHT TEST, ENOUGH
INFORMATION HAS BEEN GENERATED IN THE 53 HOURS TO INDICATE
THAT THE PROGRAM IS ON SATISFACTORY TECHNICAL GROUNDS, AL-
THOUGH THERE ARE SOME DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS WITH THE
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ENGINES. THE NEXT 6-8 MONTH PERIOD WILL BE THE MOST
CRITICAL IN A TECHNICAL SENSE. VALIDATION OF THE AIR-

CRAFT'S ABILITY TO MEET DESIGN GOALS WILL BE ESTABLISHED
BY THE END OF THAT PERIOD. HOWEVER, OUR INITIAL ASSES-
MENT INDICATES THAT THE AIRCRAFT WILL MEET TECHNICAL RE-
QUIREMENTS IN THE STRIKE ROLE.

6. THE MRCA PROGRAM COSTS ARE INCREASING BUT STILL
APPEAR MANAGEABLE. THE COMPLETE RESEARCH AND DEVELOP-
MENT COSTS AMOUNT TO 897 MILLION POUNDS (APPROXIMATELY
2.1 BILLION DOLLARS) OF WHICH GERMANY AND THE UK ARE
EACH FUNDING APPROXIMATELY 44-1/2 PERCENT AND ITALY
THE REMAINING 11 PERCENT. WITH RESPECT TO PRODUCTION
COSTS, THE ESTIMATED UNIT PRODUCTION COST HAS RISEN FROM
AN ORIGINAL 1.9 MILLION POUNDS IN 1970 TO 3.4 MILLION
POUNDS IN 1973 AND JUST RECENTLY TO 3.9 MILLION POUNDS
(APPROXIMATELY 9.2 MILLION DOLLARS). OF THE 2.0 MILLION
POUNDS INCREASE FROM 1970, 1.5 MILLION IS DUE TO INFLA-
TION AND .3 MILLION TO VARIATIONS IN EXCHANGE RATES.
REMAINING .2 MILLION (APPROX. \$470,000) IS DUE TO RE-
ESTIMATIONS AND REDEFINITION OF THE AIRCRAFT PRIMARILY
ASSOCIATED WITH THE RADAR PROGRAM. IN GENERAL, SUPPORT
COSTS ARE ESTIMATED TO BE 40 PERCENT OF THE PRODUCTION

COST. SUPPORT COSTS INCLUDE SPARES, SUPPLIES AND TRAIN-
ING, TECHNICAL DATA, ETC. PROGRAM COSTS ARE SUMMARIZED
BELOW:

PROGRAM COST IN BILLIONS OF DOLLARS

R&D	2.198
PRODUCTION (807 A/C)	7.710
SUPPORT	3.082
TOTAL	\$12.990

7. AFTER FIRST AND SECOND AIRPLANES FLEW IN 1974, UK,
FRG AND ITALY AGREED TO CONTINUE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR
FURTHER PERIOD OF SOME 18 MONTHS UP TO FULL PRODUCTION
GO-AHEAD. IN UK, MRCA SURVIVED RECENT BRITISH DEFENSE
REVIEW ALTHOUGH A REDUCTION IN PLANNED MONTHLY PRODUC-
TION RATE IS UNDER NEGOTIATION WITH FRG AND ITALY. PM
WILSON AND SECDEF MASON HAVE BOTH GIVEN STRONG SUPPORT

TO MRCA. HOWEVER, IN LIGHT OF PAST PERFORMANCES BY HMG
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AND POSSIBLY INCREASING PRESSURES IN LABOUR PARTY TO REDUCE DEFENSE BUDGET EVEN FURTHER, PROGRAM CAN BE CONSIDERED POLITICALLY VULNERABLE IN WHITEHALL. IN FRG

PROGRAM CAME UNDER SOME HEAVY CRITICISM ON COST INCREASES AND SCHEDULE DELAYS PRIOR TO FIRST FLIGHT BUT SINCE THEN THERE HAS BEEN VERY LITTLE CRITICISM IN THE BUNDESTAG. 1.2 BILLION DM (\$510 MILLION) WAS APPROPRIATED IN OCTOBER 1974 TO COVER DEVELOPMENT COST THROUGH END OF 1975, CONTINGENT ON FLYAWAY COSTS NOT EXCEEDING DM 21 MILLION (\$8.93 MILLION) AT 1974 PRICES. SINCE OUR ESTIMATES INDICATE THIS WILL BE EXCEEDED, MRCA COULD BECAUSE OF ECONOMICS OF PROGRAM BECOME MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE. HENCE WE ASSUME EMBASSY BONN WOULD AGREE THAT IT IS POLITICALLY VULNERABLE THERE AS WELL. ITALY HAS GENERALLY FOLLOWED LEAD OF BONN AND LONDON AND WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO DO SO BECAUSE OF SUBSIDIES PROVIDED BY FRG TO ITALIAN TREASURY. OF COURSE PROGRAM CONTINUATION WILL BE AS MUCH DEPENDENT ON PRESSURES OPERATING FROM OTHER SIDE (NEED TO KEEP LABOR FORCE EMPLOYED, DESIRE TO MAINTAIN TECHNICAL CAPABILITIES REQUIRED FOR ADVANCED INDUSTRIAL ECONOMIES) AND IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ESTIMATE HOW THESE FACTORS WILL BALANCE OUT.

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8. US INTERESTS IN MRCA. WE BELIEVE THAT US SUPPORT OF MRCA PROGRAM WOULD SERVE US INTERESTS FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS:

A. GENUINENESS OF OUR SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT EUROPEAN EFFORTS IN DEFENSE FIELD WHERE THESE INVOLVE DEVELOPMENT OF ADVANCED AND EXPENSIVE SYSTEMS IS SUSPECT. WE ARE REGARDED AS INTERESTED PRINCIPALLY IN A EUROPEAN MARKET FOR US PRODUCED SYSTEMS, ALTHOUGH OUR INTEREST IN ROLAND AND HARRIER HAS MITIGATED THIS SUSPICION SOMEWHAT. ACTIVE SUPPORT FOR MRCA, EVEN THOUGH IT IS PRESUMABLY NOT A SYSTEM WE WOULD WANT TO BUY, WOULD GIVE CREDITABILITY TO OUR READINESS TO SEE EUROPEANS TAKE INITIATIVE IN DEFENSE AREAS.

B. BY OFFERING ASSISTANCE WHERE POSSIBLE TO HELP EUROPEANS COMPLETE PROGRAM WITH MAXIMUM SPEED AND MINIMUM COST, WE WILL DEMONSTRATE THAT WE MEAN OUR SUPPORT FOR MAXIMUM STANDARDIZATION AND COOPERATIVE EUROPEAN ACTION IN DEFENSE FIELD. MRCA IS A POSITIVE SYMBOL OF CONFIDENTIAL

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EUROPEAN INITIATIVE AND DESIRE TO CONTRIBUTE TO COMMON DEFENSE.

C. SUCCESSFUL PRESSURES TO CANCEL PROGRAM WOULD ARISE MAINLY FROM LEFTWING AND ANTI-DEFENSE ELEMENTS AND COULD HAVE DEMORALIZING EFFECT ON EUROPEAN WILL IN DEFENSE FIELD. OVERT US SUPPORT WOULD INCREASE ABILITY OF EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS TO RESIST THESE PRESSURES.

D. A COMPETENT EUROPEAN AEROSPACE PROGRAM IS NOT A THREAT TO US BUT A STRENGTHENING ELEMENT IN EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND DEFENSE STRUCTURE. FAILURE OF MRCA WOULD BE A SETBACK TO EUROPEAN AEROSPACE PROGRAM WHICH CURRENTLY EMPLOYS 17,000 HIGHLY SKILLED AEROSPACE PERSONNEL ON MRCA AND IS PROJECTED TO EMPLOY 64,000 BY 198L. NUMEROUS COMPANIES WOULD FACE CLOSURE IF PROGRAM WERE CANCELLED, FURTHER WEAKENING ECONOMIC POSITION OF UK AND

ITALY ESPECIALLY.

E. MRCA IS A MAJOR, IF NOT WHOLLY SATISFACTORY, STEP IN DIRECTION OF THE RATIONALIZATION AND STANDARDIZATION WE ESPOUSE. WHILE OUT AND OUT PURCHASE OF A US OFF-THE-SHELF AIRCRAFT WOULD PROBABLY MAKE MORE ECONOMIC AND MILITARY SENSE, THIS IGNORES THE IMPORTANT POLITICS OF THE QUESTION. AT LEAST IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT, MRCA IS A

MAJOR STEP IN DIRECTION WE SEEK PROGRESS. FURTHERMORE, MRCA WILL PROVIDE THE THREE AIR FORCES WITH MODERNIZED, QUALITY AIRCRAFT TO MEET 1980-90 THREAT IN SUPPORT OF NATO. SHOULD PROGRAM FAIL, UK AND ITALY MIGHT NOT BUY ANY NEW AIRCRAFT BUT RATHER EXTEND SERVICES OF CURRENT INVENTORIES, SERIOUSLY WEAKENING NATO TACTICAL AIR CAPABILITIES IN THIS PERIOD. SUCCESS OF PROGRAM, IN DEMONSTRATING VALIDITY OF MAJOR COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN SUPPORT OF RATIONALIZATION AND STANDARDIZATION, COULD WELL HAVE "FIRST OLIVE OUT OF THE BOTTLE" EFFECT, MAKING FOLLOW-ON PROGRAMS MORE ATTRACTIVE TO ALL.

F. US SUPPORT WOULD CERTAINLY CREATE A MORE FAVORABLE CLIMATE FOR AWACS, F-15, F-16 AND OTHER US FOREIGN MILITARY SALES PROGRAMS IN PERIOD AHEAD. AS NOTED, CLIMATE HAS ALREADY BEEN IMPROVED IN WAKE OF US DECISION TO BUY ROLAND. SUPPORT FOR MRCA WOULD BE ANOTHER GOOD STEP AHEAD.

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G. CONSEQUENCE OF FAILURE COULD BE SETBACK TO EUROPEAN VIGOR, ENERGY AND INTEREST IN DEFENSE. A WEAKENED EUROPEAN AEROSPACE INDUSTRY THAT CANNOT CREATE, DESIGN,

DEVELOP AND PRODUCE MAJOR WEAPONS SYSTEMS IS NOT IN LONG-TERM US INTEREST. IT COULD REINFORCE TENDENCIES FOR EUROPEANS TO OPT OUT AND "LET THE US DO IT." A EUROPE WHICH FEELS TECHNICALLY INFERIOR TO THE US IS NOT A HEALTHY, SELF-CONFIDENT PARTNER.

8. WHAT THE US CAN DO. US SUPPORT FOR MRCA WOULD BE PRINCIPALLY PSYCHOLOGICAL AND NEED NOT INVOLVE LARGE EXPENDITURES. US SUPPORT COULD RESULT IN AN INFUSION OF ENERGY AND BOOST FOR MORALE OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR PROGRAM. ACCORDINGLY, WE WOULD PROPOSE:

A. THAT SECDEF COMMUNICATE WITHOUT DELAY IN WRITING TO HIS COUNTERPARTS, STATING THAT HE HAS RECEIVED REPORTS ON CURRENT MRCA STATUS AND OUTLOOK, INDICATING US SUPPORT FOR AND INTEREST IN PROGRAM, AND WILLINGNESS TO PROVIDE WHATEVER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WE CAN IN SPECIAL PROBLEM AREAS. HE COULD, IN ADDITION, INDICATE HIS WILLINGNESS TO DESIGNATE ACTION OFFICERS SPECIFICALLY TASKED TO RESPOND TO MRCA REQUESTS, AND THAT HE IS INSTRUCTING CSAF

TO BE IN TOUCH WITH HIS OPPOSITE NUMBERS IN COUNTRIES

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CONCERNED.

B. THAT CSAF FOLLOW UP IMMEDIATELY WITH OFFER TO PERMIT SELECTED RAF, GAF AND IAF AIRCREWS TO MAKE ORIENTATION FLIGHTS IN F-111 AND TO RECEIVE DETAILED ORIENTATIONS OF THE USAF F-111 COMBAT CREW TRAINING PROGRAM. THIS WOULD ENABLE COMMON NATO MRCA OPERATIONAL CONVERSION UNITS TO BE SET UP MUCH MORE EFFICIENTLY AND AT LOWER COST. CSAF COULD ALSO MAKE AVAILABLE TO THREE AIR FORCES THE SUCCESSFUL TACTICS, TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES OF F-111 IN SEA, PLUS OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS OF USAF F-111'S IN EUROPE. FINALLY, CSAF COULD MAKE AVAILABLE US INSTRUMENTED TEST RANGES FOR MRCA WEAPONS AND ELECTRONIC WARFARE TESTING IF DESIRED.

9. COMMENT: WE RECOGNIZE THAT THESE ARE HARDLY BREATH-

TAKING INITIATIVES AND WE WOULD URGE WASHINGTON TO GIVE
CREATIVE THOUGHT TO OTHER WAYS IN WHICH WE MIGHT BE OF
ASSISTANCE. NEVERTHELESS, FOR THE REASONS WE HAVE CITED
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ABOVE, WE BELIEVE THIS KIND OF A TURNABOUT IN US POSTURE
WOULD SERVE US INTERESTS IN NUMBER OF IMPORTANT RESPECTS.

RICHARDSON

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Message Attributes

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